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A Japanese American
Soldier Boy



KIYOSHI

The American Missionary Association
287 Fourth Avenue
New York City

A JAPANESE AMERICAN SOLDIER BOY

"I joined the army to fight for my country as soon as America entered the war."

We were sitting at the same table in a San Francisco hotel, when this intelligent-looking, well-dressed young Japanese made the above remark.

"Are you an American citizen?" I inquired.

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "I was born in San Francisco in 1895 and have lived most of my life in this city. I was attending the University of California when the war broke out."

"Japanese are reputed to be great soldiers and I suppose you joined because you liked that sort of thing," I suggested, hoping to draw him out along that line.

"Oh, I guess I was just like the rest of the fellows, anxious to do my bit for my country. I joined the 91st Artillery and was fortunate enough to be in the advanced detachment which was sent on ahead of the regular troops for special training in France."

"But your father and mother are Japanese citizens are they not? What did they think about your going?"

"They were perfectly willing that I should go. I shall never forget my mother's parting words as I left for the encampment. She said, 'Kiyoshi, when you first came into this world, the Heavenly Father entrusted me with your care; now that you are going to fight for your country, I can only return you into your Heavenly Father's care.' It truly seemed to me that all the time I was overseas, a Divine Providence watched over me and brought me back safely to my home and my native land. I would gladly have died for my country, and now I am ready to give my life for her."

"I judge from what you say that your parents are Christians."

"Yes. My father studied law in Japan, but gave it up because of his convictions. If, for instance, when he and two other judges on the bench were deciding a case, the other two should decide one way, he would be compelled to sign the decision with them even though he believed differently. That went against his conscience.

"So he came to America and soon after was converted by Mr. Moody in one of his meetings in San Francisco. Burning with enthusiasm for his new-found faith, he with three or four other Japanese young men formed a little evangelistic band. They were all poor, so they would take turns working to support the others in their evangelistic work. Any and all debts were promptly paid off by the ones who happened to have the money.

"It was while holding an evangelistic meeting out toward the Golden Gate Park that he met Miss ———, a Christian girl who had just come over from Japan to study. She was carried away by his religious fervor and he was attracted by her earnestness. It was love at first sight, and they were married.

"They went back to Japan to get their parents' consent. When his father found out that his son had not only become a Christian but that he had married a Christian also, he was so enraged that he disinherited them and would have nothing more to do with them. Failing in their attempts to win their parents, they decided to go back to America. They got reservations on the boat and made all their preparations to go, though they had no money with which to pay their passage. They believed that if God wanted them to go He would open up the way for them. So in simple faith in Him and in earnest prayer they waited. Some one who had been helped, a long while before, came to pay back the debt and provided them with just the amount needed for their trip."

"What did they do when they reached America?" I asked, much interested in the story.

"When they got to San Francisco he started a little grocery store to support his family, and was just getting on his feet financially when the great earthquake and fire swept everything away. He at that time owed the firm of Brandenstein a sum of \$200 or \$300 dollars but the fire had destroyed all records of it. If he had wanted to, he could have denied all knowledge of the debt and escaped payment, but writing out a statement from his memory, he presented it to Brandenstein with his note for the amount. Mr. Brandenstein was astonished at this act. He said that father was the only one of those who owed his firm money who had come around voluntarily to acknowledge and pay his debts. He told father that if he needed help at any time to call on him. Father was heavily in debt to creditors in Japan also, but instead of going into bankruptcy as many others did and cancelling these obligations, he assumed them all and worked so hard that in two years he had paid everyone."

"Is your father still in that business?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "In 1908 father was asked to take charge of the Mutual Supply Co. which, under his management, became very prosperous till 1916, when they suffered another great loss by fire. You see, they had a large shipment of goods from Japan which was discharged on the wharf at San Francisco. That same night the wharf burned and it was a total loss.

"The insurance companies claimed exemption on the ground that they insured for the voyage only and when the cargo was discharged their responsibility ended.

"The trustees of the Supply Company were overwhelmed by the loss and burden-

some debt and wanted to go into bankruptcy, but my father offered to buy up the stock on long-time payments and assume the debt. The others were glad enough to get out of it that way, so again our family had to start all over in utmost poverty, but with the firm faith that God would take care of us, as He always had in the past. We are out of debt again now and we give Him the praise."

"Your father is so occupied with his business now, I suppose, that he has no time for religious work," I remarked.

"You must not think that we are occupied solely in conducting our commercial business. At every opportunity my father helps in evangelistic meetings, and mother, too, has been active in this work. One time she was called to Sacramento to help in some meetings. While there she was attacked by severe pains just before the meeting was to begin. Lifting up a prayer for help, she went to the platform and gave her address, the pain seeming to leave her while she spoke. When she had finished speaking, the pain came back with double intensity. In spite of that fact she went to the next place, where she had promised to speak, and there again the pain left her while she spoke. She then came back to San Francisco alone, suffering intense pain; she hardly knows how she reached home. She was taken to the hospital, where the doctors said she had a tumor which must be operated on at once, but even then it was doubtful if they could save her life.

"Father gathered all of us children around him and told us that mother was at death's door. 'Now,' said he, 'let us all unite in prayer that God will save her life; and if not, that He will give us strength to bear her loss.' God heard our prayers and spared her life to us, and she seems to us always to be the living answer to our prayers."

"How many brothers and sisters have you?" I inquired.

"There are eight of us children. I am the oldest, and it is my ambition to take my father's place in the company so as to enable him to devote all of his time to evangelistic work."

"When you got back from overseas, did you finish your course at the university?"

"Yes, I was graduated from the University of California in May, 1920, and my next younger sister graduated from Stanford University in June. She is now studying in Stanford Medical School. During the time of the influenza epidemic, father wired for her to come back from college and help nurse the sick. She took charge of the improvised hospital in the Reform Church Building in San Francisco. It was a great experience for her and a great strain, too. Four of the patients literally died in her arms. She feels that in the service of medicine she can best serve her Master."

"How about the rest of the family?"

"The next one is my only brother. He is expecting to go to college this fall, and plans to study law."

"The sister next to him will also be ready for college this year. She is planning to specialize in Latin and Greek, preparatory to becoming a teacher."

"The next three are in high school, while my youngest sister is still in the grades."

"Didn't you find it hard to keep your religious faith while you were in the army?"

"That wasn't so hard," was his reply. "But when I was a sophomore in college I had a period of great struggle with doubt. I had met so many young men who had different philosophical ideas and theories and who did not believe in God, that it unsettled the simple faith I had received at home. For a week I could hardly eat, sleep

or study, but out of it came a faith that has been unshaken since."

"What are you doing now?" I asked.

"I am very much interested in work for boys. The young fellows of Japanese parentage, feeling the freedom of America, have a tendency to break away from parental control. They are truly in great need of leadership, some big brother, as it were, to help them over the time of transition.

"I have organized a Boys' Club, called "Blazing Arrows" under the pioneer movement of the Y. M. C. A. There are at present about thirty-five members. We meet every Friday night and seek to develop the athletic, social and religious life of an all-round boy. Besides that I have the intermediate class in Sunday school composed of boys and girls from ten to fourteen years of age. If I can help these young folks and be a big brother to them and answer the need in their lives which I lacked in my own life at their age, I shall feel that I am making my life count for better Americans and the cause of Christ."

This is the simple, straightforward story of a young American who was touched by the power of Christ. So many times the question is asked if the Japanese make good Christians. Do they really become earnest, sincere Christians? Does it really mean anything to them, or is it merely a matter of form or policy?

The answer to these questions would not mean much if put into the form of mere statistics, showing that we have so many missions, so many hundreds of members, so many thousands enrolled in the Sunday schools, etc. The real answer must come right out of the lives of the Japanese themselves.

There is no force which makes for true assimilation and Americanization as the transforming power of Christianity. The

American Missionary Association is seeking to solve the Japanese questions along constructive lines, bringing influences to bear that will make for a better America. Anti-Japanese legislation works injustice and hardships on them and only complicates the problem and in no way removes the difficulties. A practical Christianity lived out in the everyday life of Americans and Japanese alike will most quickly and surely dissolve the hate and race prejudice which lies at the bottom of the present bitterness and agitation.